

## Pelicanotes—By the Bugologist

A CAT may look at a king and a bugologist may write about birds.

In a beautiful little city on the west coast of Florida I first made the acquaintance of that quaint specimen of bird life, the pelican. On the dock, which juts from the waterfront several hundred feet into the bay, the fishermen love to while away the hours of sunshine catching mackerel and other fish. Here the pelicans gather and show those who care to watch their method of obtaining a livelihood.

Pelicans are a ludicrous mixture of dignity and awkwardness; their thin necks, long bills, waddling gait and slow movement when on land all disappear when in the water or flying. When looking for his dinner he flies fifteen or twenty feet above the surface of the water, suddenly stops, tips, plunges twistingly and hits the water with a splash, sending the spray in all directions.

Their dive is shallow, hardly more than the length of the body, and when they come up with their funny prisoners they have twisted again and are facing in the opposite direction. On coming to the surface they bring the bill straight up to the full length of the neck, pressing the pouch against the breast, thereby forcing out the water between the edges of the bill; then, with a flip upward and a gulp, they throw the fish into the throat and swallow it. That is, they swallow it if some marauding gull does not steal it, for the gulls are great robbers.

When the pelican dives, if there are any gulls in the vicinity they gather to the looting, alighting on the water or even on the head or back of the outraged pelican, and when he throws his head back and opens his bill then is when the gull strikes.

The pelican refuses certain fish for various reasons—the cat fish on account of the bony spikes on the side of the head, angel fish because of their broad, flat contours; various other fish are probably not to their liking.

Sometimes a foolish or inexperienced pelican will get himself into trouble by trying to swallow a fish which has been thrown to him from the dock after drying in the sun until it is hard.

I watched a case of this kind until the bird, after numerous contortions, shakings of the head, gulps and submerging his head to soften the fish or wash it loose, finally gave it up and flew away. I have wondered since how he made out.

When the pelicans start home to their roosts for the night they move in characteristic formation, as the ducks and geese do, but theirs is Indian file, evenly spaced and flying just clear of the surface of the water. As night comes the darkness of the shadows grows velvety black and across the silvery pathway of the moon silently glide a long file of our friends, the pelicans.

